



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

**JUN 26 2019**

RE: FOIA Case No. F201803909

MuckRock  
DEPT MR 33159  
411A Highland Ave  
Somerville, MA 02144-2516  
Attn: Mr. Joseph Lloyd

Dear Mr. Lloyd:

Further reference is made to your February 25, 2017, Freedom of Information Act request to the Department of State. By previous correspondence we advised you that portions of document number F002 were referred to other federal agencies. The review of this document by these agencies has now been completed.

The referred portions in document F002 are being withheld pursuant to the provisions of 5 USC 552 (b)(1).

If you have any questions regarding a particular aspect of this case, you should contact the Office of Information Programs and Services (A/GIS/IPS), Department of State, SA-2, Washington, DC 20522-8100. In any communication, please refer to the case number.

Sincerely,

William R. Terrini  
Deputy Executive Director  
Bureau of Diplomatic Security

Enclosure:  
Document F002

F012

Attachment No. 2

TRANSFERRED FOR DIRECT  
REPLY DS

October 16, 1978

MEMORANDUM

TO : A/SY/OPS - Mr. Verne F. St. Mars

THRU : SY/CC - (b) (6), (b) (7)(C)

FROM : SY/CC/TAG - (b) (6), (b) (7)(C)

SUBJECT : Assassination of John Gordon Mein,  
Ambassador to Guatemala, on August 28,  
1968--Statement by Jorge Zimeri,  
Guatemalan citizen

ALL FBI INFORMATION CONTAINED  
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED  
DATE 10-1-91 BY SP8MAC/KSE  
(JFIC)

On March 3, 1978, I interviewed Subject in Miami where he was an inmate of the Federal Correctional Institute. It was requested by (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) Chief, SY/CC, of SY/EX that I be allowed to interview Subject because of information he was believed to have on terrorist groups in El Salvador and Guatemala, as well as his possible knowledge of the assassination of U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala, John Gordon Mein, on August 28, 1968.

CLASSIFIED BY Vern F. St. Mars  
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SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652  
EXEMPTION CATEGORY 4  
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REF ID: A65937

The interview in Miami was not successful in terms of obtaining specific information; however, Subject seemed quite intelligent and, from the few statements he did provide at that time, I believed he did possess useful information. I was able to reinterview Subject when he was transferred to the D.C. Jail in June 1978. Subject has been voluntarily providing me with information with the understanding that this office was under no obligation to him in return for his assistance. This was stated in writing.

Subject has provided information on two subjects of SY interest: the assassination of the U.S. Ambassador and terrorist activities in Guatemala and El Salvador. During the course of my contact with Subject and my research on his background as well as the history of political violence in Latin America, I have discovered that his case has some peculiar aspects to it that may bear on his information. Some background on Subject may help to put his information in a better perspective. This is included separately.

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REF ID: A65937

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ASSASSINATION OF U.S. AMBASSADOR TO GUATEMALA,

JOHN GORDON MEIN - August 28, 1968

The U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala was assassinated in an apparent kidnap attempt on August 28, 1968. This was the first time a U.S. Ambassador or Consul had ever been assassinated. Approximately a day after the attack, a leftist guerrilla group, the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), claimed credit for the act in a bulletin. The bulletin claimed the Ambassador was a target for kidnapping because the FAR hoped to exchange him for one of the FAR leaders who had been captured a few days earlier. Several FAR leaders were rounded up, wanted posters circulated, and witnesses identified several men who participated in the crime. Within a few weeks police officials claimed that they had caught the individuals responsible. According to classified reports the guilty were not given trials but were disposed of by the authorities. The case was never investigated after this, according to our records, presumably because it was believed that the guilty had been caught. In 1974, a Guatemalan citizen, who had been arrested by INS, claimed to have knowledge of the assassination but he turned out to have absolutely no information.

Subject's story totally contradicts the official police version. At the time of the assassination, President Mendez Montenegro had been in office two years. (He served 1966-70.) Mendez was a civilian president and was out of step with the military which enjoyed its monopoly on the presidency.

According to Subject, the plot to kidnap the U.S. Ambassador was planned by three men: Ex-president Carlos ARANA, Ex-President Kjell LAUGARUD, and Carlos LEMUS Gallardo, presently ambassador to El Salvador. Subject states that they all "sanctified the deal," that the three were a "clique, like the Masons." Their goal was to prove that Mendez could not keep order so that the U.S. would intervene and overthrow the Mendez

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government. Laugarud and Arana had no liking for the Mendez government. Subject said Lemus designed the plot to kill the U.S. Ambassador. Lemus, according to Subject, reads Machiavelli and follows his precepts.

In March the Archbishop of Guatemala, Mario Casariego, had been kidnapped. It was rumored (and some accounts today declare it as fact) that certain rightist elements had staged the kidnapping of the Cardinal--blaming it on leftists--in hopes of bringing down the moderate government of Mendez. At any rate, shortly after this episode, Arana and Laugarud were sent on official positions out of the country, (Subject says they were "thrown out" by Mendez who discovered their activities.) Arana as Ambassador to Nicaragua, and Laugarud as Military Attache to the United States. Lemus went to El Salvador.

Apparently, around 1968, Subject became quite close with Arana. (Arana and Subject's father were "old friends.") When Arana was in Nicaragua, Subject served as his courier, traveling some eighteen or twenty times from Nicaragua to Guatemala using the code name "Suzi." He delivered notes to Oliverio Castaneda, whom Subject states had "been left behind to carry out the details of the kidnapping." (Oliverio Castaneda was a former guerrilla.) Arana's half-brother, Arturo Valadares, was also a courier.

Others who participated in the kidnapping were (FNU) VILLEDA Morales (also a member of the "Death Squad," according to Subject), and a (FNU) "El Sacaton." Castaneda, who was twenty-five or twenty-six years old at the time, could not "stand the sight of blood" so did not actually participate. Subject says a red pick-up and a Chevrolet and a Toyota were involved. Subject says no one ran after the attack, as was reported in the press, but everyone got back in the automobiles and fled.

Subject continued his close association with Arana and Laugarud, but was closer to Arana. He states

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that Mendez later found out what they had done but was powerless to do anything because he was controlled by the military. Subject heard Laugarud telling Arana, that "as soon as you take power," (Arana was elected President in 1970) that he would have to take care of Villeda Morales, "El Sacaton," Oliverios Castaneda, and (FNU) Lorenzana (N.B. Lorenzana's name was mentioned by Subject but he may have been referring to his involvement in the Casaragigo kidnapping and not Mein's) because "they were not supposed to kill the old man." Within the next four years all were dead.

Subject further stated that the Ambassador was a good friend of his "Uncle John" who told his uncle some weeks before his death, that the trouble was coming from the government, not from the guerrillas.

#### IS HIS STORY TRUE?

An obvious question that comes to mind is whether or not Subject wishes to discredit Arana and Laugarud because he views them (probably with some reason) as trying to "frame" him, and in this way he can get even. Although this has to be considered a strong possibility, there are other factors which also indicate that he may be telling the truth:

- (1) His confession at the time of his arrest in Miami that he knew who killed the U.S. Ambassador. By most accounts, he was frightened, and probably said what first came to mind.
- (2) The strange aspects of the GoG's case against Subject, as contained in Background on Subject. If there were guilt feelings by GoG authorities, they obviously would want to discredit Subject before he talked to U.S. authorities.
- (3) His close association with Arana. Arana was chief of the 1966-68 counter-insurgency campaign, gaining an international reputation because of his ruthless techniques in enforcing law and order.

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(4) Subject will testify before the U.S. Congress on his information. However, he has stated that he wants first to ensure the safety of his family and to sell his family's factories in Guatemala.

(5) Through information provided about other political personalities and activities, Subject has had an accurate knowledge of what is going on in Guatemala.

(6) Subject has not been completely cooperative. Subject has held back and, indeed, would probably not have cooperated at all but he felt he would rather cooperate with me rather than cooperate with those who were pressuring him (on other subjects). He also stated several times that he felt bad about talking about Arana. He probably would never have come forth with the information except for the fact of his arrest. He was hopeful that a change in government would allow him to return to Guatemala.

(7) Guatemalan police authorities have been less than thorough or honest in the past. On June 20, 1977, police officials reported in the press that a member of the FAR, Abilio Arturo Berganza Bocaletti had been killed and that he had participated in the assassination of Mein on December 9, 1969!! Furthermore, he had gone to Moscow to study, leaving Guatemala on August 24, 1968 (four days before the assassination). Their carelessness to details extended not only to their report to the press, but also to their report to the Embassy, where they stated he had been a member of the PGT/FAR (a totally different group which published a bulletin denying its participation in the Mein assassination). The GoG authorities apparently believe that the U.S. will not pay too much attention to details and will accept what is told them without question. They are right!!

The main points that led to the acceptance of the FAR as being responsible for the assassination were: (1) Guatemalan police reports to this effect; (2) a FAR bulletin claiming it as a kidnap attempt to rescue a former leader who had been captured by police several

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days earlier; (3) record of FAR's past violence,—its assassination of two U.S. military officers in January 1968, (4) a CIA report of July 1968 stating that the FAR may have violent plans for the U.S. Embassy or personnel.

These are persuasive arguments; however, it is also interesting to examine an OSI analysis of the guerrilla situation in Guatemala in light of the Subject's statements.

(A) Subject states that there were no guerrillas in Guatemala at the time, and that the GoG had the situation completely under control. According to the OSI document, "By mid-1967 the Guatemalan Army had virtually eliminated the movement." The report further states that assassination, (and the subsequent assassination of the West Germany Ambassador in 1970 and kidnapping of the U.S. Labor Attache in 1970) proved counter-productive, and "While the FAR received considerable publicity with respect to its cause vis-a-vis these more spectacular political kidnappings, its forces were virtually decimated by Guatemalan Army and police units between 1967-1970."

(B) Guerrilla bulletins. Subject stated that the men intended all along to blame the kidnapping on the FAR. He further stated that the army had captured their printing presses and one military officer had shown Subject a fake FAR bulletin which he displayed with pride. The OSI Report: "Despite occasional, highly publicized incidents of terrorist bravado, by 1970 the FAR and the MR-13 were...practically non-existent, but there was an informed consensus which implied that the violence was officially inspired, that clandestine paramilitary groups operated by the Guatemalan national police and the military were continuing the terror and leaving "FAR" and "MR-13" handbills at the scenes of their own atrocities."

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BACKGROUND ON JORGE ANTONIO ZIMERI

DOB: 05/17/44 - Citizen of Guatemala

U.S. Charges

On October 21, 1977, Subject was arrested by agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms on a firearms violation in Miami, Florida. Specifically, he was charged with buying two handguns while claiming on the registration form that he was not an illegal alien. Subject had an expired "green card" and apparently entered the United States on a tourist visa. He was sentenced to 18 months and five years probation on December 31, 1977. (UNCLAS)

Guatemalan Charges

Subject first came to the attention of the Department in June 1976 when the Government of Guatemala (GoG) informed the RSO that Subject was involved in a plot to overthrow the GoG, along with two Americans. The GoG requested U.S. assistance in locating Subject, whom they had learned had fled to Miami. At the time, Subject, of a wealthy Guatemalan family, was the subject of considerable press play regarding the recent discovery of a quantity of arms on his property. He was also accused of the kidnap-murder of a Guatemalan Navy lieutenant on July 10, 1975. (C/GDS decias 12/31/82)

At the time the charges were brought, Subject had been out of the country for nine months, having left after he was wounded in an ambush by unidentified persons on August 1975. (UNCLAS)

(b)(1)



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REF ID: A50118

(b)(1)

Request for RSO Support

On June 14, 1976, the GoG requested that the RSO help in locating Subject, and also requested information on the U.S. mercenaries reportedly involved with Subject in the "coup plot." (The men were Gerald Patrick Hemming and (b)(6) (b)(7)(C) ex-Special Forces officers.) A few days later, on June 22, 1976, the GoG asked RSO if the FBI could help them raise the serial numbers on the weapons found on Subject's farm. In October 1976 a lengthy FBI report containing an interview with the Hemming brothers was forwarded to the Embassy, and Guatemalan authorities were briefed regarding the FBI's investigation. In the report, the (b)(6) (b)(7)(C) denied plotting against the GoG. They also stated that Subject had "become a target for Guatemalan government assassination." (S/GDS declass 12/31/84)

Weapons Check and Extradition

The GoG request for assistance in raising serial numbers on guns found in a raid on Subject's house was never followed through. In June 1977 the Bureau of ATF contacted SY/TAG because of its interest in Subject as a result of an organized crime investigation. At that time ATF requested that State SY query the Embassy to determine if the Guatemalan authorities had ever made an official request of U.S. authorities to have the guns examined. (ATF also requested the Department to query GoG to

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determine if it wanted to extradite Subject.) In a telegram dated July 19, 1977, it was reported that GoG had sent the weapons to the Army General Headquarters for storage and that the cited weapons had not been found. According to Embassy comment, Officials "seem to have minimal interest in the weapons and the latter may very possibly have already been reissued to GoG police agencies." The GoG advised the Embassy that they intended to initiate extradition proceedings against Subject. (C/GDS declass 12/31/83)

In August 1977 an anonymous document was circulated in Miami, El Salvador, and Guatemala, which came to be known as the "Miami Document." Subject was one of two subjects of the document which places the blame for all of the terrorism in El Salvador and Guatemala on Subject and one El Salvadoran named Colonel Rene Chacon. In the document, Subject is described as a "psycopathic killer," "hitman," leader of a "right-wing group," and "Palestinian Nationalist." Col. Chacon was assassinated in February 1978. Subject has been in prison in the United States since October 1977. Terrorist activity has continued unabated in El Salvador. (Gerald Patrick Henning told a Miami police officer that he authored the document.) (LOU)

Seen in San Salvador

(b)(1)



At this point, several parts of the story are left out in order to proceed to the question which I think bears on whether Subject's statement about the U.S. Ambassador's assassination could be true. (UNCLAS)

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GoG authorities have at various times reported to U.S. Government representatives that Subject committed murder, had a weapons cache on his property, is the leader of a left-wing group, a right-wing group, is mentally incompetent, and has stated he wants to kill former President Kjell Laugarud. Yet when it comes to proving the charges, the GoG does not come through. A check on the guns was not followed through until ATF's interest in the case. Extradition? Press articles dating to the summer of 1976 showed the GoG planned to request Subject's extradition. This procedure was not begun until after the visit of ATF representatives to Guatemala in the winter of 1977-78. Legal papers submitted by the GoG authorities for extradition of Subject were considered inadequate by State Legal, and the GoG was requested to submit additional evidence. In May 1978, an additional set of papers was submitted but, as they required \$4000 to translate, State Legal sent them to the Guatemalan Embassy in Washington for translation. To date these papers have not been returned to Legal. (LOU)

It has been suggested that the GoG's lack of prompt attention to the weapons examination and the extradition are just part of the Guatemalans' lackadaisical approach to anything. I think that the reason the charges against Subject were not pursued is that the charges are either false or are not supported by any evidence. It is possible that the Guatemalans felt that U.S. law enforcement agencies were anxious to help them in their case against Subject, especially with representatives from ATF visiting Guatemala and speaking with officials there. Two key witnesses in the murder trial of the navy lieutenant changed their original statements, and in sworn testimony, stated that they knew nothing of the murder or weapons and that the GoG authorities were only trying to frame (or harass) the Subject and his family. Two other witnesses' accounts of the murder appeared in the Guatemalan press and seemed to contradict one another. (LOU)

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At least one outside researcher has found the episode against Subject to be strange. In her testimony before a hearing on human rights of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations in June 1976, scholar Suzanne Jonas, pointed out that the charges accusing Subject of being part of a rightist and leftist plot against the GoG are totally ridiculous. She cites the Minister of Government's statement that it was not a coup plot, and states that "one deduces that the Guatemalan press and Guatemalan police authorities have done a great disservice to the Zimeri family." (UNCLAS)

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ADDENDUM TO A MEMORANDUM PREPARED FOR MR. ST. MARS, SI/OPS,  
ON OCTOBER 16, 1978

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